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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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SOURCE Chin-pu Jih-pao.

EDITORIAL DISCUSSES PROBLEMS TO BE FACED
BY NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

The National Conference on Higher Education is scheduled to meet in Peiping 1-15 June. It will be attended by national leaders in the education field who will discuss fundamental and far-reaching questions, laying the basis for a great structure of higher education under the New Democracy.

Because education in the past has not been geared to the demands of reconstruction, this conference must make a careful scrutiny of the past work and set up a well-ordered plan for the future in accord with the principles of the Common Program.

A. Reform of the Institutions and Departments

If we take a long-range view, widely differing opinions will appear. It must be admitted that many institutions and departments are below standard and have no hope of improving within the next 3 to 5 years. Standardizing will benefit faculty and students and save much expense, but effecting standardization will cut across many interests and prejudices which have grown up over the years, and much opposition will be encountered. However, great care must be exercised in making changes.

1. Avoid unnecessary moving of essentially excellent institutions. Transplanting injures institutions as well as shrubs and trees.
2. A better distribution of colleges throughout the country is desirable, but not to be forced. In culturally backward regions it is not easy to plant colleges, just as it is hard to grow trees in a desert. Too great a dispersal militates against free interchange among intellectuals.
3. Whether isolated institutions or departments should be set up is an open question. There should be opportunity for mutual help through exchange of faculty and equipment.
4. Work toward having just one higher institution for each large city. Some cities already have several widely scattered institutions. This idea is a long-range ideal and not an immediate undertaking.

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5. From the above remarks it would appear that we are opposed to reforms in this field. We favor changes for the better that are moderate and practical, but feel that more study is needed in regard to those that are more sweeping.

B. Reform of Courses and System of Learning

Changes in the schools of literature and law, as proposed, seem to concern essentials; those in physics and engineering appear to be more superficial. In the writer's humble opinion, there has been considerable success in revamping the two former subjects along three lines: (1) reactionary courses have really been eliminated and those in Marxism-Leninism have been added; (2) justifiable "clarity" and "conciseness" have really been attained; (3) literature and law are now geared to the needs of reconstruction.

There have been moderate improvements in physics and engineering in the organization of material but not in the matter of conciseness. In fact, the student's load has become heavier. While there has been some needed recovery in standards after the slump during 8 years of foreign and 4 years of domestic war, now, a year after the appeal for emphasis on essentials, most institutions require more than 60 hours per week. To make 60 hours a week a rigid requirement over 4 years for graduation seems unjustifiable.

This brings us to the matter of credits. Each student must accumulate a certain number for graduation: 132 in law and physics; 142 in engineering. A unit of credit is defined as one hour in class or 2 to 3 hours laboratory per week throughout a semester. A unit thus represents some 3 hours of learning time per week throughout a semester. Now a new measure is proposed in physics and engineering courses, namely, the learning period. This is a semester hour, whether it be lecture, laboratory, or study. Either measure is satisfactory as a unit. The real nonsense comes in trying to fit all students and all courses into a procrustean bed of 4 years. Our system is too rigid; it should allow flexibility for gifted students. Indeed, the whole scheme of credits could be abolished, and a student graduated upon completion of a certain number of courses. There is just now a crying need for trained men, and education should be so reorganized as to turn them out in a large volume and a short time.

C. Provision for Faculty and Equipment

Appalling lacks in faculties and equipment should be supplemented at an early date. Several plans may be suggested for strengthening faculties.

1. Call back Chinese students or professors in foreign countries. The government has already had some success in this. Despite strenuous efforts by the US government to hold intellectuals there, many are eager to return. Nevertheless, there are still many Chinese specialists employed abroad who hesitate to return; greater efforts should be put forth toward them.

2. Send talented young teachers to study in the Soviet Union and in the New Democracies; we have much to learn from these countries, and in the past have learned all too little.

3. Encourage our professors to do research, to improve their quality; and grant them such opportunities through sabbatical leaves.

4. Most important, train our own supply of professors in our own higher institutions. However, unless our universities and research centers are fully equipped, such a task will be difficult.

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With regard to equipment, in recent years comparatively few books and magazines have come in from abroad. While some have come from the Soviet Union, not only are they insufficient, but also they cannot be fully effective due to language obstacles. To meet the present urgent need, we hope that the government will make plans for purchase and distribution of books and magazines and that a large number of Russian-language books may be translated. There should also be planned production of Chinese-language textbooks and reference works. Through government encouragement, we believe that many will come forward to do such work. Without a comprehensive plan, costly duplication cannot be avoided. Suitable scholars should be assigned by the Ministry of Education to such projects, to be completed within a definite time. Results will be apparent within 3 to 5 years. As to instruments, supplies, etc., the government agencies should combine to build factories for producing said articles, meanwhile buying abroad as needed.

It is necessary, even in these difficult days, to put money into education as a long-term investment.

D. United Recruiting of New Students

Such a practice, already successfully tried in East China and proposed for North China, has many self-evident advantages. It avoids "shopping around" with its attendant evils. Many features could be standardized.

A final problem is that of the colleges being overloaded with students. Although the number is indeed not sufficient to supply the nation's need for graduates, there is very serious overcrowding of buildings and overtaxing of facilities. What can be done, in view of the constantly increasing number of those who want to attend college?

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